

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the Application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A system for providing product location information within a store, the system comprising:

a first user interface positioned within the store in a substantially stationary manner, the first user interface configured to receive an input signal from a user related to a product that may be available within the store, to process the input signal and to provide a product inquiry signal in response to the input signal, the first user interface further configured to receive an information signal, and to provide an output signal in response to the information signal, and

an inventory information unit coupled to the first user interface and comprising a database containing product location information and additional product-related information including product availability information, the inventory information unit configured to provide the information signal to the first user interface after receiving the product inquiry signal from the first user interface,

wherein the information signal provided by the inventory information unit at least sometimes includes a first portion of the product location information, and

wherein the information signal provided by the inventory information unit depends at least sometimes upon a first portion of the product availability information,

whereby, when the input signal is indicative of a product location inquiry and the inventory information unit determines based upon the product availability information that the product is unavailable at a location, the [inventor] inventory information unit configures the information signal so that the output signal provided by the user interface does not provide an indication that the product is available at the location.

2. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the first user interface includes

a receiver configured to receive the input signal, the input signal being a voice signal,

a speaker configured to provide the output signal, the output signal being a synthesized voice signal, and

a voice recognition and response unit configured to process a receiver signal indicative of the input signal and configured to provide a speaker signal from which the speaker generates the synthesized voice signal.

3. (Currently Amended) The system of claim [1] 2, wherein the voice recognition and response unit includes a microprocessor programmed with voice recognition and voice synthesization software.
4. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the first user interface is at least one of a stand-alone device and a device configured to be mounted on a structure within the store, and wherein the first user interface is configured to be at least one of fixed at an end of an aisle of the store, fixed near a middle of an aisle of the store, fixed within a point of purchase display of the store, fixed on a wall of the store, embedded within a shelving structure of the store, fixed near a checkout counter of the store, and suspended from a ceiling of the store.
5. (Cancelled)
6. (Original) The system of claim 1, further comprising an input button, wherein the first user interface is configured to receive the input signal from the user only for a predetermined period of time after the input button has been triggered.
7. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the database of the inventory information unit is programmed with the product location information by downloading the product location information from an overall store information unit that is coupled to the inventory information unit.

8. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein the first user interface includes a keyboard entry device configured to receive the input signal, the input signal being a keying-in action,

a visual display unit configured to provide the output signal, the output signal being a visual output, and

a keyboard recognition and response unit configured to process a keyboard signal indicative of the input signal and configured to provide a video signal from which the visual display unit generates the visual output.

9. (Original) The system of claim 8, wherein the keyboard entry device and the visual display unit form a single touch screen input device, and wherein the user interface further includes a printer which is configured to print out at least one of listings and maps.

10. (Original) The system of claim 1, further comprising a second user interface, the second user interface being coupled to the inventory information unit.

11. (Original) The system of claim 1, further comprising a second user interface, the second user interface being coupled to the first user interface that is coupled to the inventory information unit.

12. (Original) The system of claim 11, wherein at least one of: the first user interface acts as an intermediate hub and only intermittently communicates with the inventory information unit; and the second user interface comprises the inventory information unit.

13. (Previously Presented) A system for providing product location information within a store, the system comprising:

an information unit including processing circuitry and a database containing product location information and additional product-related information including

product availability information, the information unit configured to receive and input signal, to process the input signal, to obtain at least a first portion of the product location information and at least a first portion of the product availability information from the database in response to the processed input signal, and to provide an output signal that is determined based upon at least the first portions of the product location information and product availability information, and

an input/output device that is positioned at a location within the store in a substantially stationary manner, the input/output device configured to receive a user input concerning a product location inquiry and to provide the input signal to the information unit in response to the user input, and to receive the output signal from the information unit and to communicate a user output in response to the output signal,

wherein at least some of the product location information and some of the additional product-related information is updated over time to reflect changes in inventory occurring within the store,

whereby, when the information unit determines based upon the product availability information that a product is unavailable at a location, the information unit configures the output signal so that the user output provided by the input/output device does not provide an indication that the product is available at the location.

14. (Currently Amended) A system for providing product location information within a store, the system comprising:

an input means for receiving an input signal;

a signal processing means for processing the input signal to generate a product inquiry signal, the signal processing means being coupled to the input means;

a data storage means for storing product location information and providing a product location information signal to the signal processing means in response to the product inquiry signal, the data storage means being coupled to the signal processing means;

an output means for providing an output signal, the output means also being coupled to the signal processing means, wherein the output means generates the output

signal in response to a command signal from the signal processing means, which generates the command ~~sign~~ signal in response to the product location information signal; and

an updating means for modifying at least a portion of the product location information to reflect changes in inventory occurring within the store,

wherein the input means and the output means are positioned within the store in a substantially stationary manner, and

whereby due at least in part to the updating means the output signal provided by the output means is configured to avoid an indication that a product is at a first location within the store when the product is no longer available at the first location.

15. (Original) The system of claim 14, wherein a user interface comprises at least one of: each of the input means, the output means, the signal processing means, and the data storage means; and each of the input means, the output means and the signal processing means.

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Original) The system of claim 14, wherein a user interface comprises each of the input means, the output means and the signal processing means, and wherein the user interface is coupled to a central hub that comprises the data storage means, and wherein the user interface is coupled to the central hub by way of electrical wiring.

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Original) The system of claim 14, wherein a central hub includes the signal processing means and the data storage means, and a user interface includes at least one of the input means and the output means.

20. (Cancelled)

21. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 1, wherein the additional product-related information includes information regarding at least one of the following: information concerning a quantity of the product within the store; information concerning a price of the product; information concerning a presence or absence of the product within the store; information concerning a time at which the product should be available at the store if the product is currently absent from the store; information concerning a sale/promotion relating to the product; information concerning an alternate store at which the product may be available; and information linking one product with another product in a cross-referential manner.

22. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 1, wherein the information signal provides at least one of information concerning a quantity of the product that is available at the store, information concerning a price of the product, information regarding a presence or a lack of availability of the product at the store, information regarding a time of availability of the product when it is determined that the product is not currently present within the store, information regarding a sale/promotion relating to the product, information regarding a second store at which the product is available, and information regarding an alternative product.

23. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 13, wherein the output signal indicates that a product is unavailable if the first portion of the product availability information indicates an absence of the product, and wherein the output signal indicates a corresponding product location for the product if the first portion of the product availability information indicates a presence of the product, wherein the corresponding product location is determined based upon the first portion of the product location information.

24. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 13, wherein the additional product-related information includes information regarding at least one of the following:

information concerning a quantity of the product within the store; information concerning a price of the product; information concerning a presence or absence of the product within the store; information concerning a time at which the product should be available at the store if the product is currently absent from the store; information concerning a sale/promotion relating to the product; information concerning an alternate store at which the product may be available; and information linking one product with another product in a cross-referential manner.

25. (Currently Amended) A system for providing product-related information within a store, the system comprising:

a product information database that stores product-related information,
wherein the product-related information includes product location
information, product availability information, and product promotion
information; and

a terminal, coupled to the database, that receives product location inquiries from users and outputs, in response to the inquiries, at least a first portion of the product location information and a first portion of the product promotion information,

wherein the terminal is positioned within the store in a substantially stationary manner at a first location, and

wherein at least one of the first portion of the product location information and the first portion of the product promotion information relates to at least one of a first product about which a first product location inquiry was made, a second product that is similar in type to the first product, and a third product that is located near a location of the first product,

whereby when the product availability information within the database indicates that the ~~first~~ first product is unavailable at a location, the terminal avoids providing an indication that the first product is available at the location as the first portion of the product location information.

26. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 25, wherein at least one of the following is true:

at least some of the product promotion information is cross-referential between two different products; and
the terminal forms part of a point of purchase display.

27. (Previously Presented) An inventory information system for implementation within a store, the inventory information system comprising:

a first user interface configured to be positioned in a substantially stationary manner at a first position within the store, wherein the first user interface includes first input means for receiving first input signals from first users and first output means for providing first output signals to the first users;

a second user interface configured to be positioned in a substantially stationary manner at a second position within the store, wherein the second user interface includes second input means for receiving second input signals from second users and second output means for providing second output signals to the second users, the first position being different from the second position;

at least one database coupled at least indirectly to the first and second user interfaces, wherein the at least one database stores product-related information concerning a plurality of products, wherein the product-related information includes product location information concerning respective locations of the plurality of products, and product availability information concerning respective availabilities of the plurality of products, and wherein at least some of the product-related information is communicated to the first and second user interfaces to be provided at least indirectly as the first and second output signals in a manner responsive to product-related inquiries represented by the first and second input signals; and

purchase-related interface means for providing purchase-related information to the at least one database indicative of purchasing of at least some of the products,

wherein the at least one database is capable of recording the purchase-related information and further capable of comparing first data related to the purchase-related information to second data related to at least one of the first and second input signals, whereby third data indicative of at least one of customer behavior and customer preferences can be derived from the comparing of the first data and the second data.

28. (Previously Presented) The inventory information system of claim 27, wherein the first output means includes each of a printer capable of printing maps providing directions for customers regarding how to travel to at least some of the respective locations, a sound-outputting device capable of providing happy tones when the product location information within the database corresponding to a requested one of the plurality of products indicates that the requested one product is available within the store, and at least one of a voice output device and a visual display.

29. (Previously Presented) The inventory information system of claim 27, wherein the first and second input signals include customer identification data indicative of identities of the first and second users, and wherein aspects of at least some of the product-related information communicated to the first and second user interfaces to be provided at least indirectly as the first and second output signals vary in dependence upon the customer identification data.

30. (Previously Presented) The inventory information system of claim 29, wherein the aspects include at least one of product brand information, product promotional information, product price information, and related product information, and wherein in at least some operational circumstances additional signals are provided for receipt by store personnel indicating particular customers are interacting with the first and second user interfaces.

31. (Previously Presented) An inventory information system for implementation within a store, the inventory information system comprising:

a first user interface configured to be positioned in a substantially stationary manner at a first position within the store, wherein the first user interface includes first input means for receiving first input signals from first users and first output means for providing first output signals to the first users;

a second user interface configured to be positioned in a substantially stationary manner at a second position within the store, wherein the second user interface includes second input means for receiving second input signals from second users and second output means for providing second output signals to the second users, the first position being different from the second position;

at least one database coupled at least indirectly to the first and second user interfaces, wherein the at least one database stores product-related information concerning a plurality of products, wherein the product-related information includes product location information concerning respective locations of the plurality of products, and product availability information concerning respective availabilities of the plurality of products, and wherein at least some of the product-related information is communicated to the first and second user interfaces to be provided at least indirectly as the first and second output signals in a manner responsive to product-related inquiries represented by the first and second input signals,

wherein the at least one database further records inquiry information concerning the product-related inquiries represented by the first and second input signals; and

means for analyzing the inquiry information to determine additional information concerning at least one of customer preferences and customer behavior.

32. (Previously Presented) The inventory information system of claim 31, wherein the first and second input signals include customer identification data indicative of identities of the first and second users, and wherein the additional information is indicative of at least one of the customer preferences and the customer behavior of particular identified customers.

33. (Previously Presented) The inventory information system of claim 31, wherein the additional information includes primary information indicating that a subset of the plurality of products are relatively-preferred products, secondary information indicating that customers are having difficulty locating a given one of the plurality of products, and tertiary information indicative of differences between the product-related inquiries and actual product sales information determined by way of a purchase-related interface means for providing purchase-related data to the at least one database.

34. (Previously Presented) The inventory information system of claim 33, wherein the first and second user interfaces are configured for being retrofitted onto existing store structures including at least one point-of purchase display, the at least one database is capable of communicating data to an off-site database, and the first user interface is capable of providing at least one output signal not based upon the product-related information from the at least one database.